

PERSPECTIVE

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So, you've always wanted to write that book. . .

Publishing industry being changed by emerging role of authors' agents

By John Duffy

TRADITIONAL relationships between Canadian authors and publishers are being transformed by the increasingly powerful presence on the literary scene of authors' agents.

With direct personal experience in publishing, by developing contacts in major literary markets outside of Canada, and by applying a hard-nosed bargaining approach in negotiations for manuscripts, a coterie of new agents is bringing Canadian writers to the attention of the world book markets. But more than that: agents now are forcing Canadian publishing houses to sign more generous contracts with authors and, to some extent, are demanding that publishers take a more active role in the marketing and publicizing of books.

"The fact that five new agents have emerged in this country, three of them in the past 10 to 12 months (there were only three previously), is an indication of the degree of professionalism the industry is starting to acknowledge to itself," says Ellen Powers, executive director of the Writers' Union of Canada. "Publishing is a business, and there are certain types of relationships that have to be sorted out properly."

Robert Fitzhenry, president of publisher Fitzhenry & Whiteside Ltd., says authors' agents now are a "necessity," serving publishers by screening manuscripts, rejecting unsaleable material and offering only works of real value.

The fact remains, of course, that though perhaps sometimes valued by publishers, agents work specifically for the writer, usually for a fee of 10% of the author's eventual revenues arising from the sale of his or her book. (All an agent's work is "on spec": the agent is not paid unless a sale is made.)

Nevertheless, Fitzhenry's evaluation of the agent's role is shared by such leaders in Canadian publishing as Jack McClelland, president of McClelland & Stewart Ltd., Robin Brass, managing editor of McGraw-Hill Ryerson Ltd., and Malcolm Lester, president of Lester & Orpen Dennys Ltd. — reflecting a growing interdependence here between agents and publishers (but a relationship that has been accepted in the huge U.S. publishing industry for 40 years). To McClelland, it signals an "impending

for an advance against future royalties, which are calculated on the basis of 10% of the selling price of the book on the first 5,000 copies, 12½% on the next 5,000 copies and 15% thereafter. It also gives an author a percentage from the sale of subsidiary and world publishing rights. This can vary from 50% to 90% of the sale price, depending on the nature of the rights sold and the clout the author holds in the marketplace.

In his own case, Bruneau says, the contract provided a \$1,000 advance, royalties (less the advance) on the sale of "about 2,000" books to date, and a \$3,500 fee to translate his work into French — "about half the standard translation rate," he claims.

To get this contract, Bruneau signed away all rights to the novel to General — Canadian, world and subsidiary (movie, TV, reprint and adaptation rights), and gave General right of first refusal on his next novel. The publisher made no contractual commitment to publicize *Moving Out* and, Bruneau says, the only promotional tour he made on behalf of his book was paid for entirely by a government grant.

Bruneau now has signed with a literary agent, and, he says, he will sell only Canadian rights to a Canadian publisher in the future. He has, he says, absolutely no faith in the ability of Canadian publishers to market books in the lucrative U.S. market.

New hungry agents entering the field are challenging what they regard as the cozy relationships between existing agents and publishers.

Well-established Canadian agents, such as Marie Molinaro, hold out little hope to the beginning author for a change in this situation in Canada. The first-time author has to go through the painful, frustrating period of getting his or her first book published without the help of an agent. Like the publishers, Molinaro does not want to risk her time with an untried author's work.

However, new, hungry agents now entering the field are challenging what they regard to be the cozy relationship between some established agents and publishers.

agents, has become increasingly discouraged with Canadian publishing houses. She decries the conservatism born of secure government subsidies, and the lack of initiative in marketing books in overseas markets. Indeed, the Hoffmans regularly by-pass Canadian publishing houses completely when submitting manuscripts, preferring to work in the better-paying U.S. market. If Canadian publishers show interest, they can bid for Canadian rights later.

"Books are commodities that have to be sold, just like any other product," she says. "And an ad in a trade publication does nothing to bring a book to the buying public."

The Hoffmans charge that Canadian publishers have had no real incentive to aggressively market books by relatively unknown authors, because grants cover most of the basic costs of printing and publishing, and the marginal sale of 2,000 or 3,000 copies will provide a small profit. The author, however, winds up with a pittance for his or her effort.

Lucinda Vardey, active as an agent for almost two years, agrees that Canadian publishers are not set up to market books effectively, especially overseas, but she blames the situation on lack of staff in the marketing area, not on the individual editors.

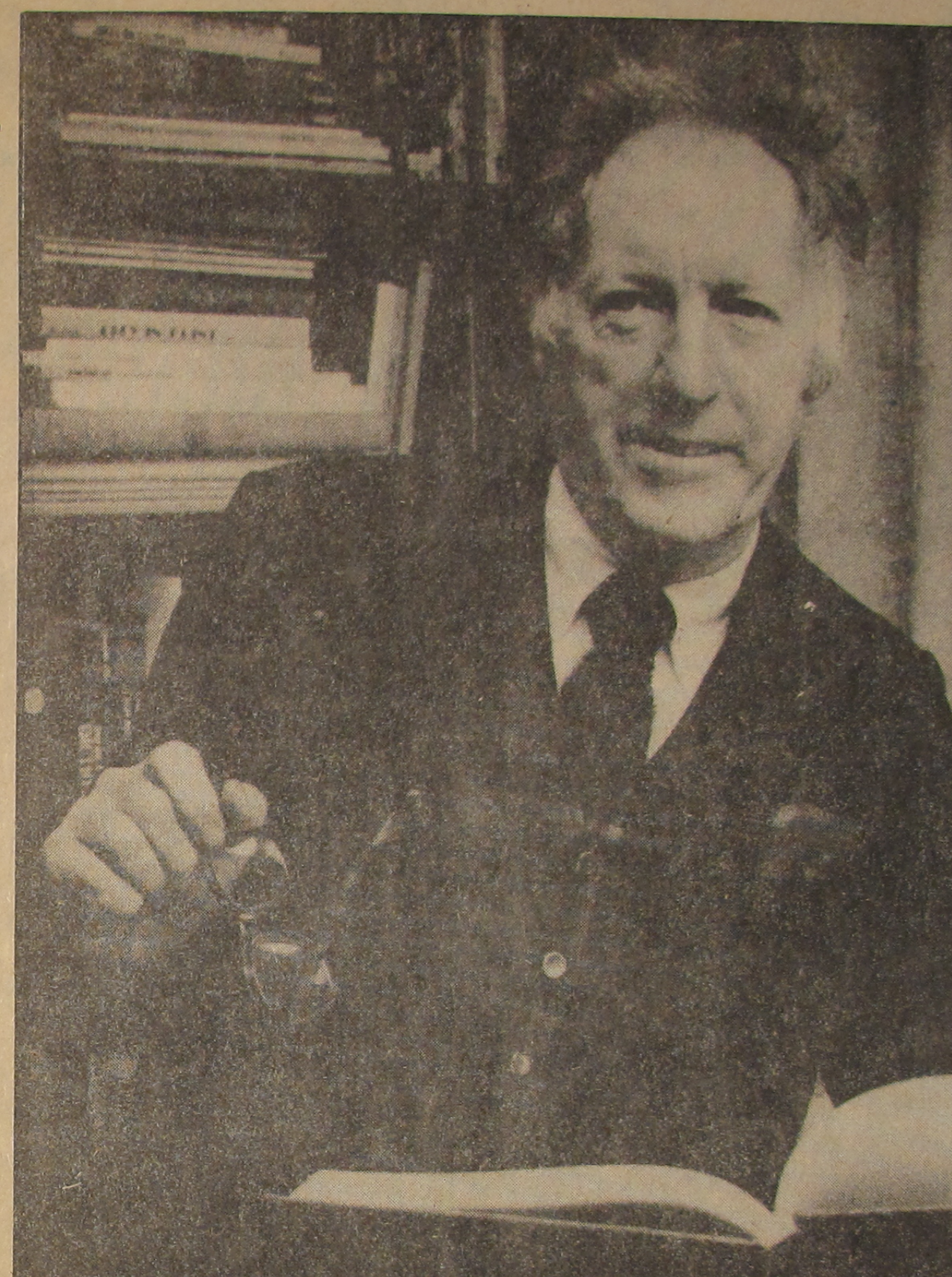
"If you're going to be caught up in red tape and memos and establishment accounting, you're not going to be out on the street selling books," she says.

She also sees a serious lack of "acquisition editors" — people who are out and around actively seeking the new writers coming up who will be the literary stars of the future.

The notable exception to the general insularity of initiative, seen by critics, among Canadian publishing houses is Lester & Orpen Dennys. For several years now, President Malcolm Lester has taken a more aggressive approach to the sale of world rights for his authors, making major efforts in overseas-rights sales — and with some success.

But even he admits that, historically, these initiatives have not been made by Canadian houses, and that other firms are only now taking the first, tentative steps to sell their books overseas.

Nevertheless, Lester insists, the complaint that Canadian publishers



Robert Fitzhenry: 'Authors' agents now a necessity.'

—Peter Redman/Financial Post

or all — of the risk of publishing a first book by a new writer, and thus expands opportunities for new talent to break into print.

But at the same time, she says, this tends to discourage publishers from risking their own time and capital in promoting a book.

This system is diametrically opposed to the American. In the U.S., a manuscript is judged solely on its merits. If accepted by a publisher, it is promoted accordingly — and the promotional budget is considered to be, routinely, an integral part of the publishing-marketing process.

Government subsidies to Canadian publishers fall into two major categories:

- Grants to small (or new) houses with a minimum of six eligible titles in print, ranging up to about \$3,000. (In a fiscal year, these total about \$100,000.)

- "Block" grants to major publishing houses having more than 15 titles in print — which, depending on the house and the record of past performance, can range up to \$60,000, to be apportioned among many titles. (In the 1975 fiscal year, these grants totaled \$1.6 million, divided among 95 publishing houses.)

These grants, says Luc Jutras, arts officer, writing and publication section

markets. Now many agents and publishers are beginning to see a change in focus on the part of some of the better Canadian writers, who are starting to produce literature of wider appeal. With the focus now swinging away from "navel-gazing," manuscripts are more readily sold in more lucrative markets, and greater pressure can be brought to bear on Canadian publishers to sell and promote "literature" rather than "Canadian literature" — and on authors to produce "good writing" rather than "good Canadian writing."

Ellen Powers of the Writers' Union (formed in 1971 and now with 384 author-members) estimates fewer than 25% of Canadian authors now have agents. But she says the number is growing, and most new writers now are first completing their manuscripts, then seeking out agents — before approaching publishers.

Marion Hebb, legal counsel for the Writers' Union, strongly advises any author to hire either an agent or a lawyer before signing a contract with a publisher. But, she says, she also

recognizes that the beginning author is at the mercy of the publisher — to get his or her first book published, the beginner may feel compelled to sign a poor contract.

All the publishers interviewed insisted the established Canadian author does not need an agent in the Canadian market — and yet, it is perhaps interesting to note that such prominent literary figures as Don Harron and Barbara Amiel do have agents (Marie Molinaro and Nancy Colbert, respectively).

Pierre Berton and Richard Rohmer serve as their own agents in Canada — but then, Berton is on the board of publisher McClelland & Stewart, and Rohmer is a lawyer. Outside Canada, both authors rely not on their publishers to represent their work, but on a U.S. agent (John Cushman).

'The number of Canadian authors with agents is growing and most new writers seek out an agent before approaching a publisher with their manuscript.'

Peter C. Newman does not have an agent — and he's not happy with the results. He signed a contract with McClelland & Stewart, giving that publisher worldwide rights to *The Bronfman Dynasty* — "unfortunately," he says.

"There's no question I could have had a better deal," Newman says. "He (Jack McClelland) sold the American rights to Atheneum, and I was not at all happy with what Atheneum did with the book."

Newman feels that far more could have been done in the marketing effort, with better bookstore distribution and more personal involvement on the part of Newman himself in publicizing the book.

As far as Newman is concerned, the book did well in the U.S. in spite of the marketing efforts, and he bitterly regrets his lack of choice in the selection of the American publisher.

He disagrees with Canadian publishers when they say they cannot afford to pay authors big advances against sales.

"My experience," he says, "is that you can penetrate the Canadian market much more deeply than the American."

With 100,000 hardcover sales of *The Bronfman Dynasty* in Canada, Newman is "very happy" with the Canadian marketing effort done by McClelland & Stewart. But: "I was not happy with the way any of my books were handled in the States."

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Nevertheless, Fitzhenry's evaluation of the agent's role is shared by such leaders in Canadian publishing as Jack McClelland, president of McClelland & Stewart Ltd., Robin Brass, managing editor of McGraw-Hill Ryerson Ltd., and Malcolm Lester, president of Lester & Orpen Dennys Ltd. — reflecting a growing interdependence here between agents and publishers (but a relationship that has been accepted in the huge U.S. publishing industry for 40 years). To McClelland, it signals an "impending maturity" in the Canadian publishing industry.

Traditionally, the relationship between Canadian author and publisher has been one of paternalism toward the author, with the publisher "allowing" a manuscript to be published and the author being pathetically grateful for whatever meagre financial rewards might accrue to him.

Andre Bruneau, author of last year's critically acclaimed novel, *Moving Out* (French-language title: *Quebec Adieu*), was not represented by an agent, and because this was his first novel, he says, "I was willing to accept anything to get into print."

Bruneau signed a standard publisher's contract with General Publishing. With minor variations, this standard contract gives a publisher all of an author's book rights to a manuscript. It provides

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However, new, hungry agents now entering the field are challenging what they regard to be the cozy relationship between some established agents and publishers. They are demanding — and getting — changes in the traditional publisher's contract. Agents such as Lucinda Vardey, Pat Stewart and Helene Hoffman are getting from publishers bigger advances, greater control over the sale of world and subsidiary rights and firm commitments that there will be adequate distribution and marketing. And publishers are being held to greater accountability for, and speed in, paying accrued royalties.

In some cases, agents now are offering only Canadian rights to Canadian publishers, or are by-passing the Canadians entirely, going instead directly to the lucrative U.S. market. In the latter case, books by Canadian authors will eventually get back into Canada if and when Canadian rights are bought here.

Helene Hoffman, who along with her husband Larry is the newest of the new

insularity of among Canadian publishing houses with Lester & Orpen Dennys. For several years now, President Malcolm Lester has taken a more aggressive approach to the sale of world rights for his authors, making major efforts in overseas-rights sales — and with some success.

But even he admits that, historically, these initiatives have not been made by Canadian houses, and that other firms are only now taking the first, tentative steps to sell their books overseas.

Nevertheless, Lester insists, the complaint that Canadian publishers tend not to support authors with publicity is a "myth."

"Publishers don't print books to store them in warehouses," he says.

His firm, he says, just recently signed a contract with an author, guaranteeing a \$5,000 promotional budget for the author.

But, say publishing industry critics, such a commitment is decidedly not standard practice in Canada.

Here, publishers generally do not allocate a flat, across-the-board promotion budget on a per-copy basis. Budgets tend to vary not only from company to company, but from title to title. In some cases, as Lester has pointed out, promotion or expenditures are fixed by contract with the author.

In short, the more clout an author has in the marketplace, the bigger the promotion budget is likely to be — either because of the author's insistence, or because of plain business sense.

What's done outside Canada? Agent Vardey tells of her previous experience as a promoter for Collins Publishing in New York. There, she says, budgets for paperback promotion ranged 6¢-30¢ per printed copy, and hardcover budgets ran about \$1 per book. The actual amount of the budget was highly dependent on the publisher's judgment of the worth of the book being promoted; it rarely had anything to do with the experience of the author in the marketplace.

Vardey says the Canadian system of government grants to publishers performs a crucial function for first-time authors; it shifts to government some —

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These grants, says Luc Jutras, arts officer, writing and publication section of the Canada Council, are provided specifically to "try to offset the anticipated deficits on eligible publications." Without the federal largesse, he says, many books by Canadian authors would never reach print — and by implication, Canadian cultural development would suffer as a result of this loss.

Government grants are crucial for new authors but tend to discourage publishers from risking their own time and money in promoting a book.

Additionally, the federal government supports publishers with programs such as:

— Travel-allowance grants, which pay the travel expenses of authors doing promotional tours.

— Translation grants, which pay the publisher up to 6¢ a word to cover the cost of translating a work from French to English, or vice versa.

Finally, there are various levels of grants given directly to established writers, sometimes including travel expenses, designed to simply keep writers alive while they are working on approved manuscripts.

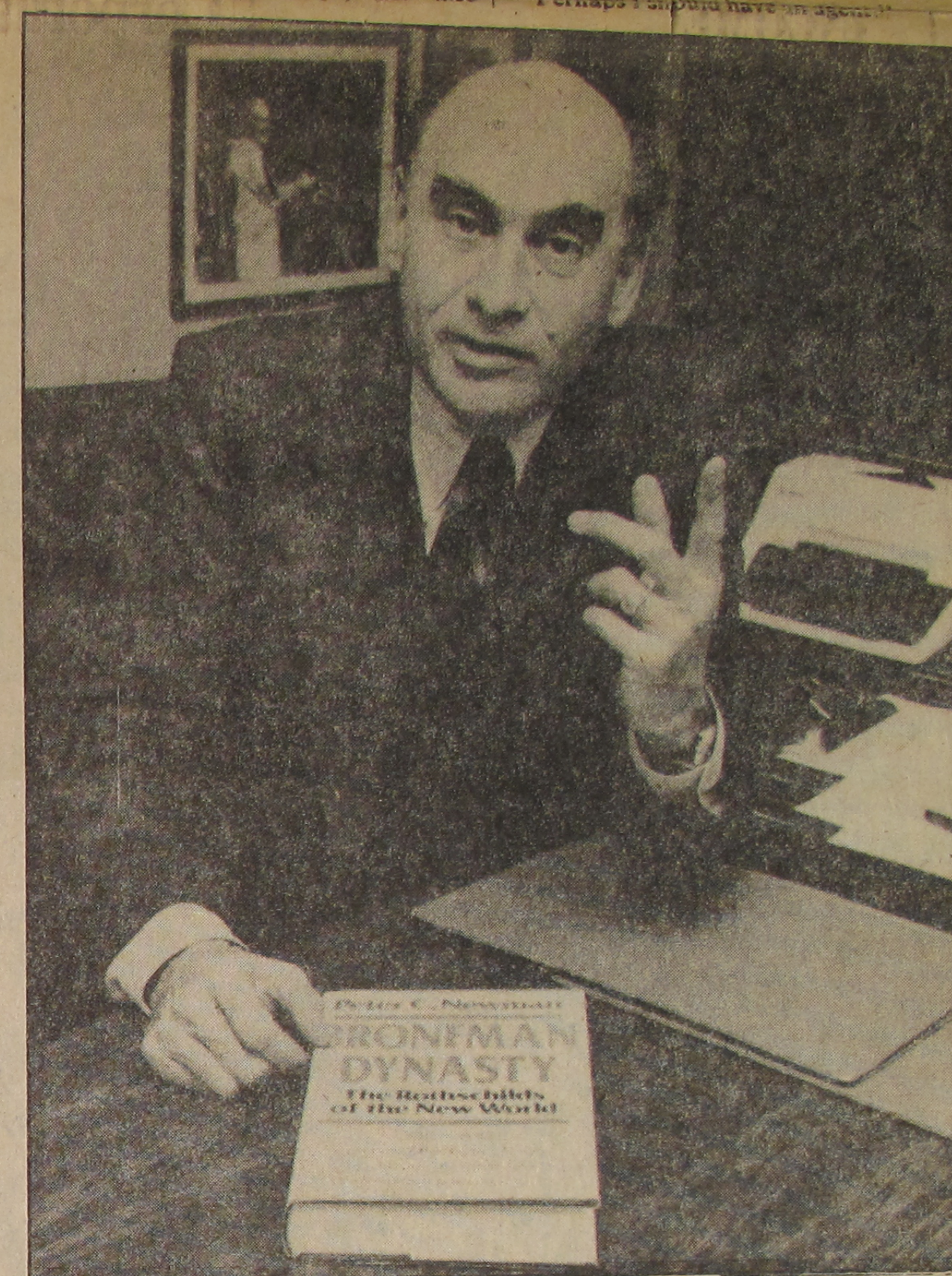
The present system has assisted Canadian authors in the writing of intensely parochial work, exploring the Canadian condition, but producing books of little interest or value in world

growing, and most new writers now are first completing their manuscripts, then seeking out agents — before approaching publishers.

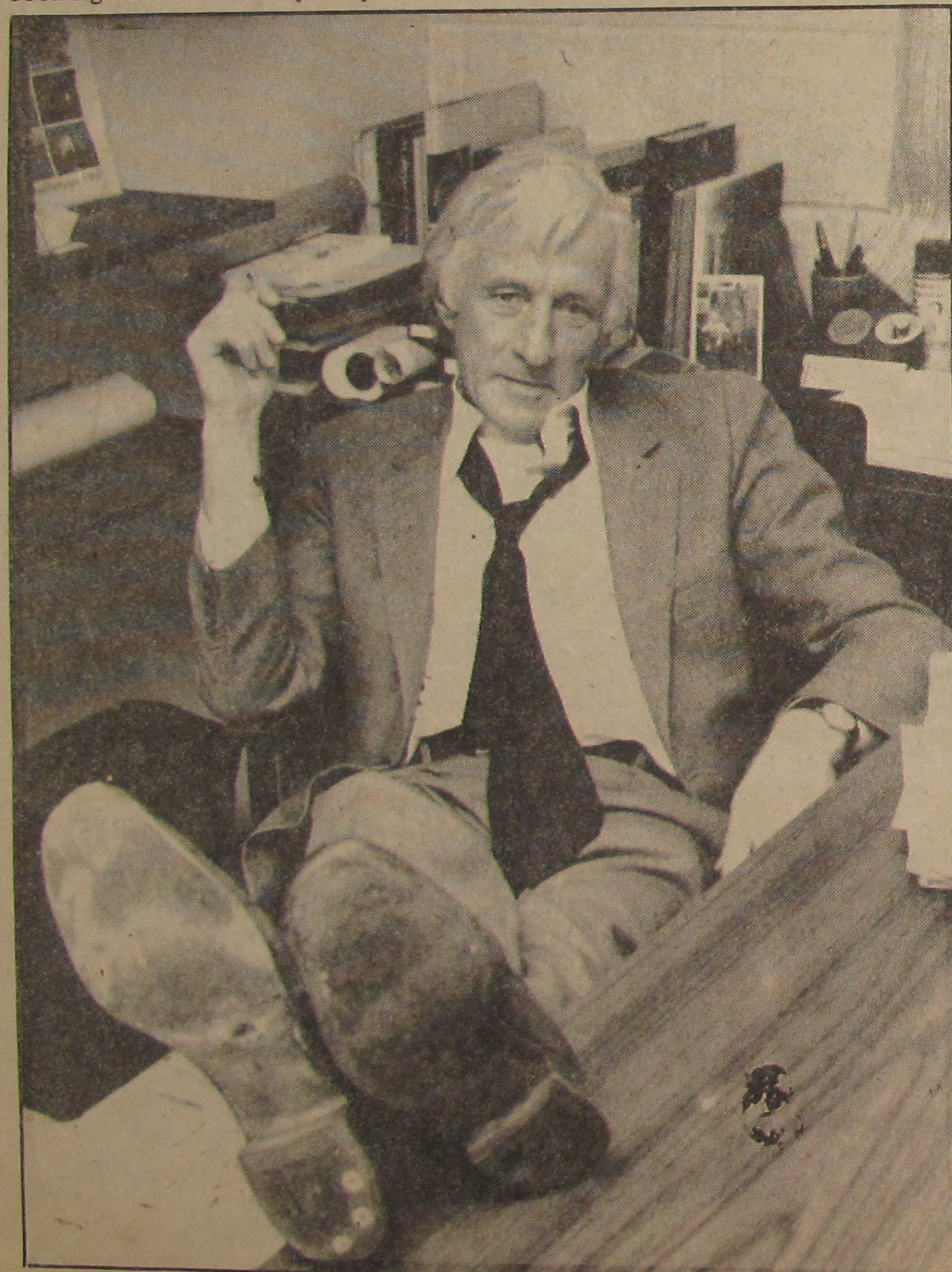
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There is a pause, and he muses: "Perhaps I should have an agent."



Peter Newman: Not happy with marketing of his books in the U.S.



Jack McClelland: 'Impending maturity in Canadian publishing.'

What the Canada Council offers writers and publishers

THE CANADA COUNCIL assists writers and publishers in many ways, direct-assistance programs to poets, playwrights and authors being only one of them. It provides support programs for the translation, publication, promotion and distribution of Canadian books and periodicals, as well as acting as co-ordinator of the National Book Festival. Included in its programs:

• **Block grants** to major publishers of more than 15 approved titles — of which four have been published within the previous year — applied to offset deficits arising from the publication of work by Canadian writers.

• **Project grants** for individual titles, awarded to publishers who have a minimum of six eligible titles on the market, generally averaging less than \$3,000 per title.

• **Translation grants** of up to 6¢ per word to translate either from English to French, or vice versa.

• **Scholarly manuscript grants** given to assist in the publication of work of a scholarly nature, made available through the Social Sciences & Humanities Research Council and administered by the Canadian Federation for the Humanities and the Social Science Federation of Canada. These totaled \$552,000 for the 1978-79 fiscal year. Estimated expenditure for 1979-80: \$679,000.

• **National associations of publishers grants** applied to costs of general operating expenses, special projects, annual meetings and conferences. There is no ceiling. The biggest grant to date: \$75,453.

• **Promotion and distribution project**

grants have provided funds ranging \$1,399-\$144,500 (the amounts dependent on the size of the projects). They are made available to finance co-operative projects designed to increase public awareness of Canadian books and writers in general.

Living

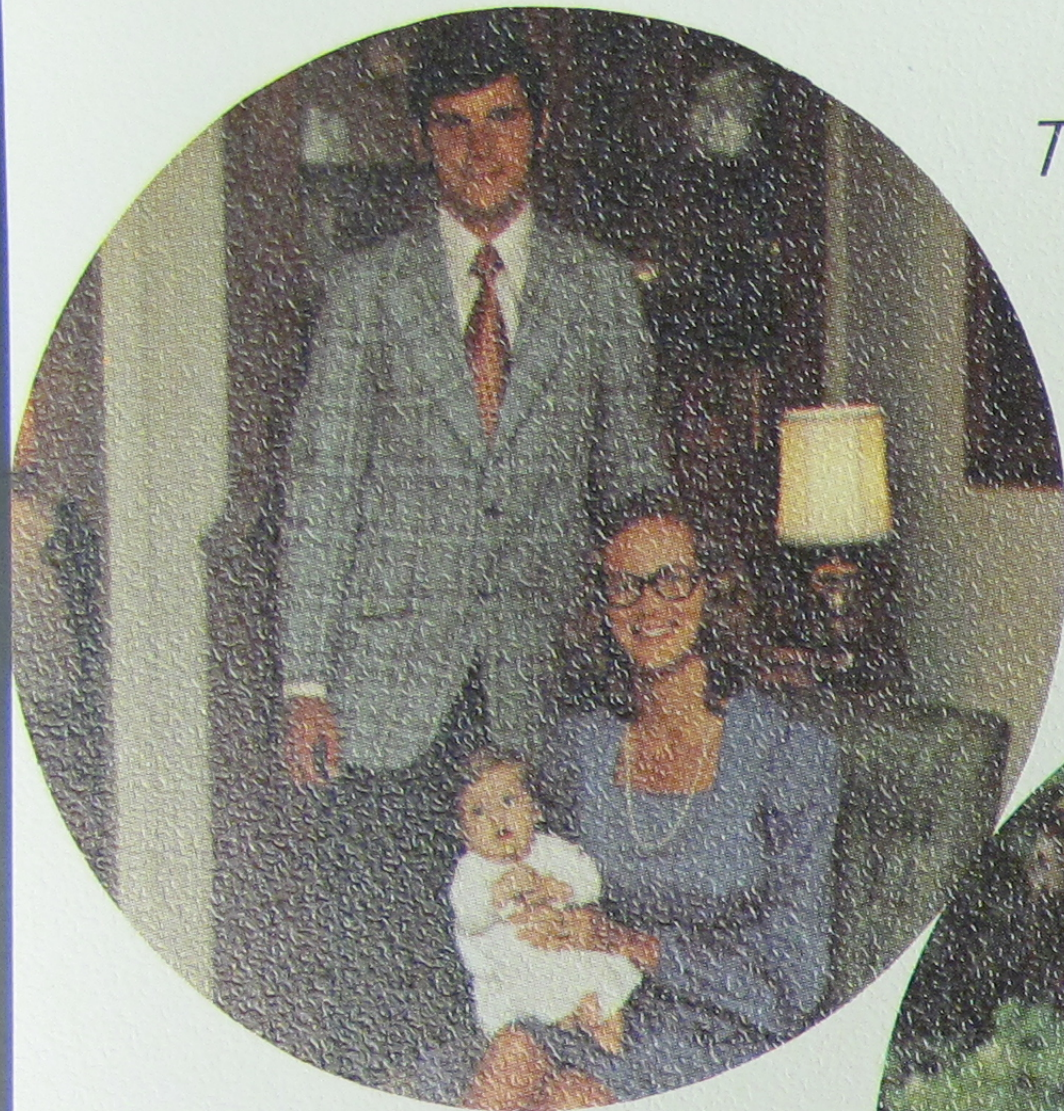
• **Promotion-tour grants**, limited to either actual travel expenses, or up to \$50 per day in living expenses for an author to use in promoting his or her own Canada Council-approved title.

• **Promotion of prize-winning works grants** — financial assistance on a cost-sharing basis with publishers to promote books having won specific literary prizes. Limit: \$2,000 per title.

• **Book purchase/donation program** — the purchase and free distribution of Canadian books both at home and abroad to groups that would otherwise be unable to afford them. In 1979, 116,000 books worth \$607,000 were distributed.

• **Book-kit exchange program** — 100 French-language or English-language books are assembled and sent to libraries of the alternate language area, to help foster English-French understanding. In 1978-79, 52,500 books were purchased, at a cost of about \$300,000.

• **National Book Festival** — an annual "celebration of Canadian books and magazines," whose 1979 budget was \$900,000 — but whose 1980 budget has been pared to \$300,000.



Sam Fuller, Carol Ann &
Blythe McKenzie Fuller



Craig & Cheryl
McKenzie



Nancy Lee & Wes Prince

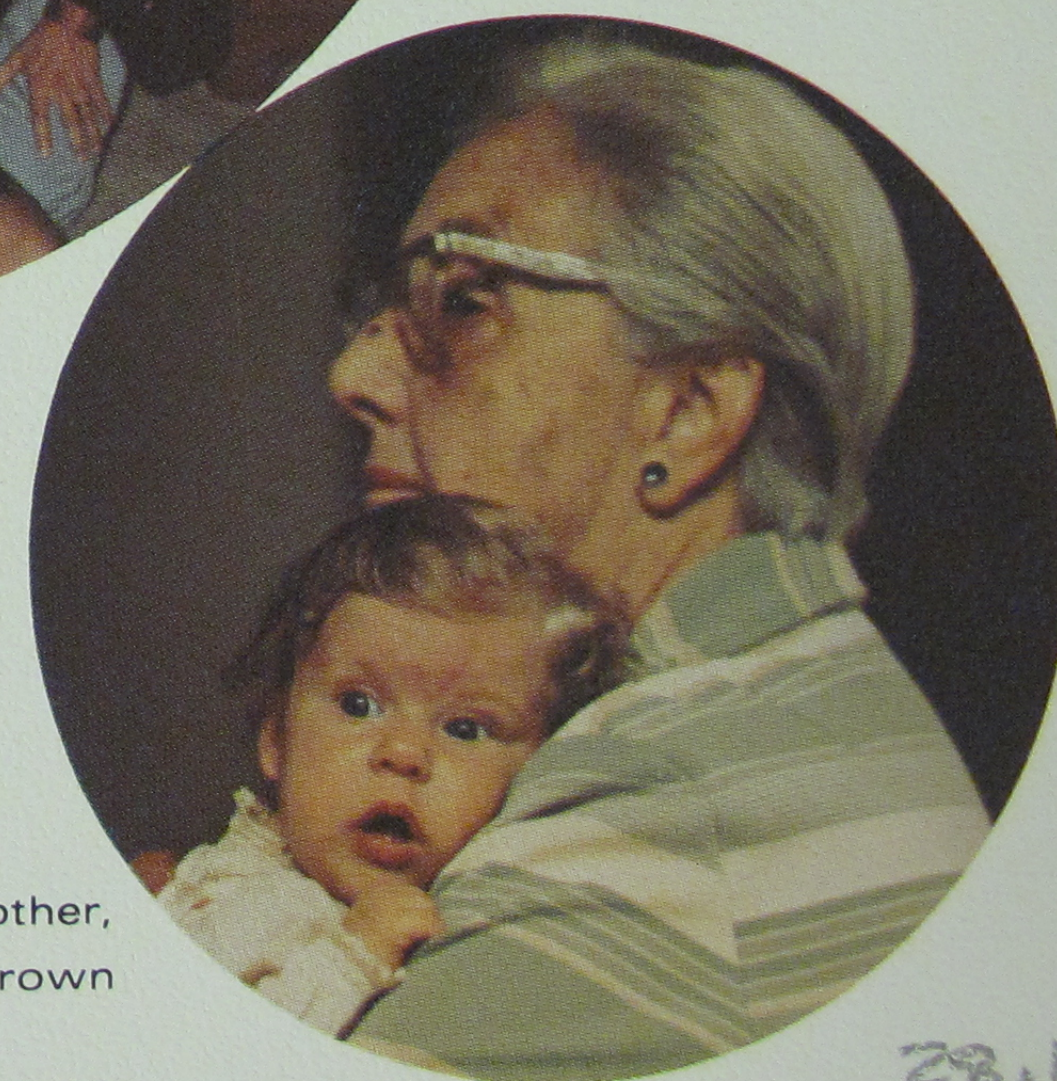
*The circle symbolizes eternal
life and love...as in the
Christmas wreath and
the wedding ring*



Heather &
Her Family

Virginia & John McKenzie

81 Blackland Rd., N.W., Atlanta, Ga. 30342



Blythe & Great Grandmother,
Ruby White Brown



Class of 1977

The Senior Class
of
Lakeside High School
announces its
Commencement Exercises
Wednesday evening, June eighth
Nineteen hundred and seventy-seven
at half after seven o'clock
Lakeside High School Gymnasium
Atlanta, Georgia



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